NEVADA Sage
News from the Bureau of Land Management
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Lightning Storms Ruin Rangeland

Hot Summer Winds Fan Wildland Fires

Spectacular, and devastating. The summer of '99 will remain in memory as the worst fire year on record in the Great Basin.

For several years, prime growing conditions have given the northern lands of Nevada a covering of fine fuels. Then hot winds dried the rangelands. Lightning storms, passing along the Interstate 80 corridor, ignited an inferno.

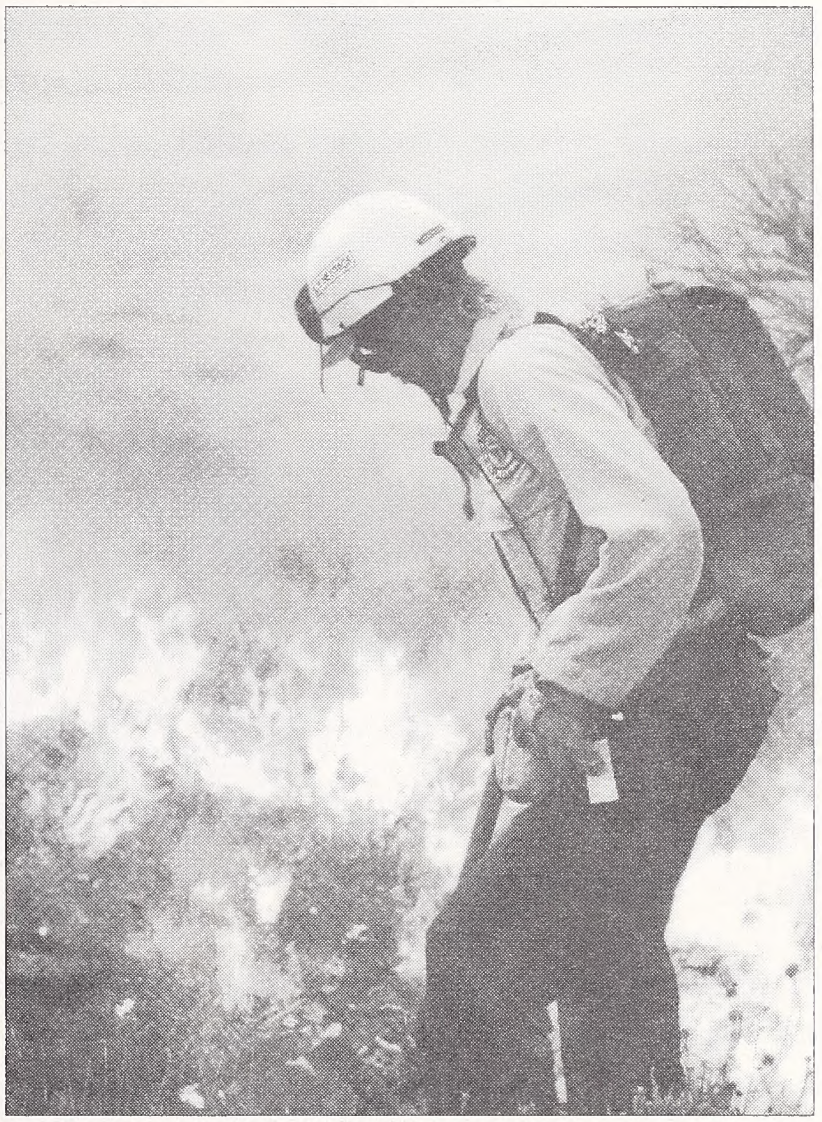
More than 1.5 million acres were burned over. Compare that to Nevada's "normal" fire year of 243,000 acres.

The BLM, with support from other agencies and volunteers, waged an all-out fire fight. Nearly 3 million gallons of fire retardant were dropped on fire lines along with countless helicopter water drops.

More than 4,000 firefighters battled the blazes.

As the ashes started to cool, BLM moved toward rehabilitation and long-term restoration of the land.

In this issue of *Nevada Sage*, we hope to give you insight into firefighting and an understanding of the fire management program.



Working close to fire is hazardous. Wildland firefighters build lines ahead of the flames, working "in the green."

Chris Ross photo

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Major Firefights Involve Carefully Trained Teams

A major firefight doesn't just happen.

When a wildland fire blows up big, or even threatens to do so, or when it threatens homes and property, BLM has a carefully prepared system of responses. The same organizational structure can be and is used for floods and other natural disasters or emergencies. The BLM has also used it for major non-emergency events.

In the case of fire, everything begins with "initial attack." A call comes in to one of the dispatch centers, and a predetermined response is put into action. Several factors are considered as BLM determines whether to

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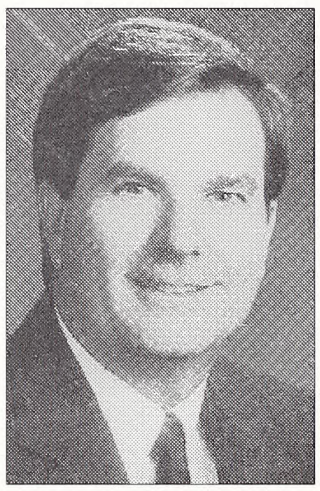
State Director's Column

BLM Faces Many Challenges as Fires Char Nevada

August 1999, is a month those of us in Nevada land management will not soon forget. It will go down in history ahead of other "fire bust" years documented in 1996, 1986 and 1964.

Lightning was the principal cause of the recent fires, although there were several fires this summer that were ignited by careless acts of individuals. In the final count, more than 1.5 million acres of Nevada land were burned over. Major fires occurred in four of the BLM's six field office areas. At times, field office fire management officers were working with more than one incident command team. Coordination from the fire lines to the command post, the field office, and the Great Basin Coordination Center was excellent. Interagency coordination was similarly impressive. It was a test of all of our fire management planning, and we passed with high marks.



Bob Abbey

The record of the thousands of firefighters, including many volunteers, brought to bear against these flames is impressive. Each of us owe a great debt of appreciation to the people who were involved in the battles.

The first two rules in Nevada's standing fire management orders are safety of firefighters, and safety of the public. The injury rate this summer was low. That there were so few fire-related incidents is a tribute to the incident commanders and their staffs, the crew chiefs and the firefighters themselves.

Now we face a new challenge. The loss of rangeland is a severe setback. Our efforts to rehabilitate these burned areas will indelibly mark the rangelands of Nevada for decades to come.

The fires diminish Nevada's wildlife habitat, grazing land and natural resources. Left untouched, weeds, including noxious weeds and cheatgrass, will proliferate. Quick-curing cheatgrass will set up a new cycle of fire.

Rehabilitation of a million-plus acres is a major undertaking, one which the BLM cannot complete alone.

A state and federal interagency group has been meeting to discuss the interests of land users across the board. An interagency Incident Command Team has been established to lead our rehabilitation effort. Resources lost to fire include sagebrush benchlands, pinyon pine/juniper forests, grasslands, and a variety of northern Nevada ecosystems.

Seed, mixed to prescriptions for specific areas, is already ordered. We know at the outset that acquisition of adequate amounts of seed will not occur this year, since there was no way that seed producers could have anticipated this demand. Planting will continue through next year, and possibly into 2001.

Replanting is only one part of post-fire range rehabilitation. Temporary fences will be needed, and many permanent fences must be repaired or replaced. Rangeland enhancing projects, such as wildlife guzzlers, will also have to be repaired or replaced.

Your public lands are in need of your help. BLM field office managers and staff, involved with identifying the many and varied components of rehabilitation, will welcome offers for assistance.

Our opportunity, and challenge, is to bring life-sustaining vigor to the rangelands. We need volunteers to help us create a wildland legacy to be enjoyed by many generations to come. Together we will be able to effect a positive change to our public rangelands.

Nevada Sage is published by the Nevada State Office, Bureau of Land Management, to inform the public and employees about BLM people, programs and activities in Nevada.

Questions, comments, requests to be added to the mailing list, and address changes may be forwarded to the Editor, or to the Chief, BLM Office of Communications, P.O. Box 12000, Reno, NV 89520-0006. The office is located at 1340 Financial Boulevard in Reno.

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Nevada's Mines Bring Big Equipment from Pits To Join Firefighters in Battling Wildland Blazes

By Chris Ross

During the outbreak of wildland fire in 1996, Nevada mine operators became aware of the potential risk of fire. That year, flames brought the problem to their front doors. In the aftermath of the fires, many of the mines established procedures to help combat fire on nearby rangeland.

Benefits from this advance planning and commitment were realized during the August fires, which presented overwhelming demands on state and federal firefighters. Mine personnel in fire areas responded rapidly and effectively, and were of major assistance controling a number of fires.

> **BLM firefighters were impressed by the size and capability of the mining equipment. The 18,000 gallon water truck which Cortez supplied is four and a half times as large as a standard highway water truck.**

The Cortez/South Pipeline Mines south of Beowawe quickly put a dozer, a large grader and a massive water truck into the battle against the 56,000 acre Frenchy Flat fire. The mine supplied a maintenance crew to service and repair agency fire equipment. The mine's airport became a single engine air tanker base for several days.

Near Lovelock, the Coeur Rochester Mine used equipment to build lines on the 14,000 acre Rochester fire. Troy Fiero, head of technical services at the mine, said, "For two days we had all three of our water trucks out, along with a dozer and a grader and ten men."

At the Newmont Gold Quarry Mine near Carlin, a fire of about 500 acres broke out after a lightning strike near Mill One. Newmont's Randy Squires said, "The Nevada Division of Forestry requested our assistance, so we put 12 people out on it as hand crews, along with two dozers. At the Ajax fire we worked 18 employees and a dozer, and at the Welches fire we had another five people with a dozer and a grader."

Florida Canyon Mining ran water trucks at a fire near Unionville.

BLM firefighters were impressed by the size and capability of the mining equipment. The 18,000 gallon water truck which Cortez supplied is four and a half times as large as a standard highway water truck. Even more impressive was the speed and willingness with which the mines responded.

Tom Leshendok, BLM's deputy state director for minerals, said,"The results were a clear demonstration of the commitment which Nevada's gold industry has made to local community involvement and public resource protection."

Federal mining regulations require mine operators to take all reasonable measures to suppress fires in the area of mine operations. However, many Nevada mining companies were interested in expanding that role with more aggressive action.

The BLM initiated a meeting in May 1997, to share lessons from past fires and to finalize a mutual aid agreement. Under the agreement, area mines can contribute workers and equipment to combat wildland fire. The meeting was attended by representatives of 13 large Nevada mines, BLM fire and minerals personnel, the U.S. Forest Service, Nevada Divisions of Wildlife and Forestry, and members of local emergency planning commissions.

Among the topics discussed were training and communication problems, the need to minimize environmental damage during firefighting, the incident command structure, debriefing and rehabilitation. Two years later, that planning paid off.

The Western Great Basin Interagency Fire Center, located at the BLM Nevada State Office, maintains a web site during fire season.

The site is available at:

http://www.nv.blm.gov/

Click on the link named **"Fire."**

Carefully Trained Teams

Continued from Page 1

dispatch one or more fire engines and crews, or a helicopter attack ("Helitack") crew, air tankers and an air attack aircraft.

As that initial attack crew begins its work, constant radio communication keeps the dispatching office, and the Western Great Basin Control Center in Reno, informed.

Kevin Hull, BLM state fire management officer, said "Resource Management Plan objectives for the affected land come into play early in a fire management situation. Through the planning system, BLM has established general guidelines for fire management in any given area. That's the reason we call it fire management, and not just suppression."

The first day and night are the "first burning period." Throughout that time, decisions are being made as to what resources to bring to bear against the fire. Tanker bombers arrive over the fire from airports in Minden, Stead, Chester, Calif., or Battle Mountain.

Greg Gall, BLM aviation manager, said that "as the fire grows larger, an air attack plane will be put above the fire, to act as eyes in the sky for the Incident Commander (IC) on the ground, and as a traffic coordinator for tanker bombers."

Incident Management Teams

A decision may be made to bring in an Incident Management Team, often referred to simply as an "overhead team." That group will arrive within hours of being called. Overhead team members come from many disciplines within the agency. Their mission now is management of the entire incident, whether it is fire or some other mobilizing cause.

Vehicle washdowns on return from fire lines are thorough. A hotshot crew pitches in to ensure their "crewbuggy" is not carrying weed seeds or other contaminants from one fire scene to the next. During the washdown, equipment and supplies in the vehicle are also cleaned and replaced or restocked.

The overhead team will include the IC, a command staff, and a general staff. The command staff is responsible for safety, public information, and if necessary, liaison. Safety of the firefighters is always the most important element of firefighting. A liaison may be required when other agencies are involved, for example in a fire involving Indian Reservation lands, or lands withdrawn for military purposes.

Members may come from agencies other than the BLM, such as the U.S. Forest Service or other state or county agencies. In some cases, they may be on the scene for up to 21 days. At that point, if the incident is still active, new personell will replace them.

The number of people involved in each element of

the overhead team will depend upon the nature of the fire. Decision criteria include whether or not people and property are at risk, what resource values at risk, costs, location and public sensitivity to the fire. A resource advisor familiar with the area is brought in from the local field office.

Types of Teams

The initial attack is conducted by a Type IV team, an engine crew or helitack team. A pre-designated individual on site as part of the response is in command. As the firefight intensifies, a Type III team may be organized to control the incident. Initially, it may not include all parts of the overhead team. After appropriate briefing and organization, the IC takes charge of the fire. The IC is delegated authority by the field office manager, who is the line officer with responsibility for that part of the public land.

Standup meetings provide coordination and information which are critical to firefighter safety.

A helitack crew is delivered to rough country by helicopter, and then may attack the fire as a hand crew. Or they serve as ground crew for a helicopter as the pilot attacks the fire with a hanging water bucket. The helicopter pilot dips the water bucket in a lake to fill it, then brings it over the fireline and releases the water on the flames.

When the criteria for a Type III team is exceeded, and depending on the complexity of the incident, a Type II, and even a Type I team, may be brought in. The differences are subtle, relating to training an experience.

W. "Tooter" Burdick of Ely and Roger Vorce of the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) are Nevada BLM's two Type II team leaders. Burdick said type 22 teams can call upon NIFC for support. With coordination in that office, thousands of firefighters and suppression resources are moved through the country to meet the need.

BLM fire crews, stationed throughout Nevada, are made up of seasonal employees who staff agency fire engines and are usually the first on the scene when fire breaks out. Jerry Soard, leader for the Silver State Hotshots, said "'Hotshot' crews are highly-trained, highly-disciplined teams.

"We move in where terrain prevents engines from operating," said Soard. "The crew is in prime physical condition. We can cover open ground and lay down a 'hand line' while moving at a rapid pace."

Demobilization

NIFC operates from offices at Boise, Idaho. Based on years of experience, NIFC warehouses hold pre-packaged units useful during major incidents. It may include a radio package, camp material, food, or any of a hundred other things that become necessary to a successful firefight.

As the fire finally winds down, "demobilization" begins. The whole process works in reverse, until the people who remained to monitor for flareups determine the fire is out.

In their vehicle, or someplace handy, each member of an Incident Command team has a packed bag, ready for the next call which may come at any time.

Fire doesn't respect land ownership. In 1998, Nevadans were dispatched to Florida to provide overhead support during a disastrous series of fires, all of which were on private land. Others were sent to New Mexico, where more fires were raging.

As one of the nation's most highly trained and best organized programs of major incident response, BLM overhead teams receive international respect.

"Feel the Heat" Takes Viewers to the Fire Line

The Discovery Channel's large-format film, "Wildfire: Feel the Heat," is showing at the Reno National Bowling Stadium.

Daily shows of "Wildfire" are at noon, 1:30, 3 and 4:30 p.m. Evening shows are scheduled Thursday-Saturday at 6:30 and 8 p.m. Admission to see the 40-minute film is $6 for adults, $4 for children 12 and under, and $4 for seniors 60 and older.

Fire in Inaccessible Terrain Challenges Smoke Jumpers

By Richard Brown

Smoke jumpers in Northern Nevada are never far from the aircraft that sits out on the tarmac, surrounded by neat piles of fire fighting gear. One pile per smoke jumper.

When the fire alarm sounds, the jumpers race to their own separate piles of gear, put on all 80 pounds of stuff, board the aircraft, and are airborne in six minutes — most men take longer than that to shave in the morning.

Frank Domingues knows the drill. The 10-year veteran BLM smoke jumper can tell you a thing or two about the adrenaline rush you get when the alarm sounds.

Frank Domingues

"Generally, we stick with the plane, then when the call comes, we suit up and we're out of there," Domingues said. "The suits are designed so you can just throw them on and zip them up. We don't have any time to be looking for lost gear. It's got to be laid out so you can grab it and go."

Domingues has been a wildland fire fighter for the past 17 years, with not only BLM but also the Forest Service and the National Park Service. For the last seven years, he was based at Fort Wainwright, Alaska, near Fairbanks.

After 17 years of jumping into fires, and a couple of knee surgeries, Domingues decided he wanted to "see how the other half lives," and try working in a fire dispatch center. So this fire season, he's been temporarily assigned to the Western Great Basin Coordination Center in Reno, where he works as a logistics dispatcher.

Domingues has jumped into many different kinds of terrain, but he knows from experience that northern Nevada can be a special challenge, especially when you've spent half the fire season jumping onto the Alaskan tundra. Since the fire season in Alaska lasts only half as long as in the "Lower 48," Alaskan smoke jumpers usually spend the

last half of the fire season in places like northern Nevada.

"You go from dropping on the nice, spongy tundra of Alaska from May through mid-July, to harsh, rugged high-altitude landings in the Great Basin," he said.

Most of the wildland fires in Alaska are at the lower elevations. But the opposite is true in northern Nevada, where even the valley floors are more than 4,000 feet above sea level. Jumping can be much more challenging in the Great Basin because of the high winds, rocky ridge tops and the thinner air density at high altitudes. The thinner air density affects chute maneuverability, and the high winds make it even worse — especially at the ridge tops.

Jumpers have a degree of control over where their chutes take them, according to Domingues. But, cargo boxes are free-falling and they sometimes float long distances from the jumpers. When this happens, the jumpers must spend time and energy hiking to find and retrieve the cargo boxes.

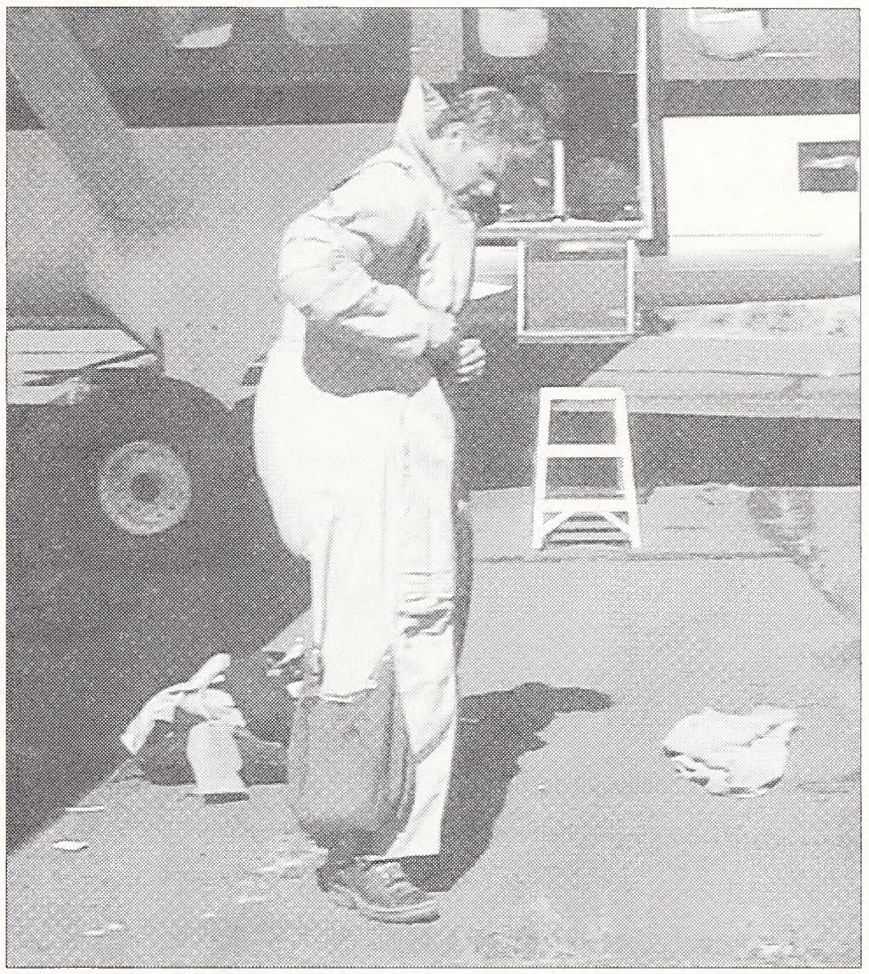
Each jumper wears about 80 pounds of gear onto the plane when the alarm sounds. This includes:

- ☐ Kevlar jump suit
- ☐ Main chute
- ☐ Reserve chute
- ☐ Harness
- ☐ Personal gear bag clipped to the front of the harness
- ☐ Miscellaneous gear in the jumpsuit's leg pockets

What the smoke jumper carries in must also be hauled out. So after the fire is put out, they not only have to haul out the 80 pounds of gear they jumped in with — they also have to carry out another 20 pounds or so each of the equipment and supplies that were dropped in by cargo chutes.

Cargo boxes are dropped after the pilot ensures the smoke jumpers are safely on the ground, according to Domingues. The boxes contain tools, food and other equipment the jumpers will need while they're fighting the fire. They are normally self-sustaining for two days.

People who do that kind of hauling, jumping and



Heavy canvas jumpsuits are laid out carefully near the aircraft door. Smokejumpers can quickly "suit up" when a call comes for assistance.

hard work in the hot sun at high altitudes have to be in top physical condition, Domingues said. Fire fighting is a dangerous line of work, even for experienced smoke jumpers.

"You need to pace yourself so you're not exhausted at the wrong time," said Domingues. "You always need to have energy in reserve. Many times I've seen jumpers exhaust themselves, especially at the higher altitudes. This is why physical fitness programs are so demanding for jumpers.

"One of the main reasons why people wash out of smoke jumper rookie training is their inability to keep up with the physical fitness requirements."

Domingues said many of the places where he's fought fires were quite beautiful, places that he only got to see because his job took him there. And this Native American smoke jumper is no stranger to beautiful places. He grew up in Yosemite National Park, where his father worked for the National Park Service. His mother is a Yavapai Apache from Arizona, and his father is a Coastal Miwok from California.

"Old West" Teams Up with Space Satellites

World's First Downlink Adoption Finds Homes for Wild Horses

By Maxine Shane

John Winnepenninkx never aspired to be a Maytag repairman. At times he appears to be a quiet man with a long name, but when he begins to talk about wild horses, he's exuberant.

When the telephone with the free 800 number to pre-qualify to adopt a wild horse via satellite began to ring on his desk in Battle Mountain, Nev., John was in his element. His first calls were from Iowa and California. Delaware, Pennsylvania and Texas calls followed.

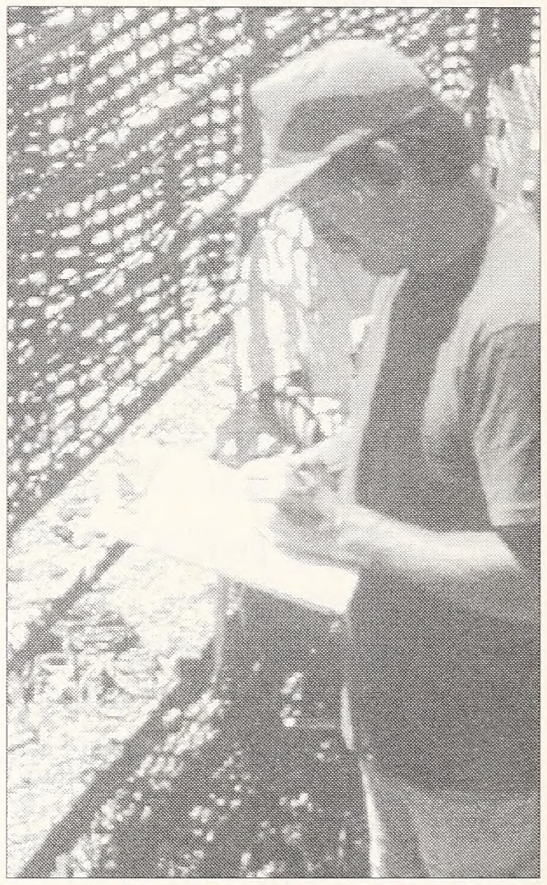
The BLM in Nevada offered 130 "lots" of wild horses for adoption on August 6 via a live auction broadcast on C Band Satellite. Forty-seven mares with foals, 42 geldings and 38 studs were offered to pre-qualified adopters who first received a bid number issued by Winnepenninkx and his conscripted assistants Shawna Richardson, Bryan Fuell and Jack Hamby. Volunteers also buzzed around John's and Shawna's corner of the office, helping out.

It was all worth it. After a lively competitive bidding session, 61 animals were placed. Another 26 found homes with pre-qualified bidders immediately after the auction broadcast left the air. While many of the horses were adopted for $125 each, the highest bid in each category was: $1,000 for a two-year old gelding and $700 for a two-year old stud, both from the Monte Cristo Herd Management Area (HMA); and $950 for a pair, the mother coming from the Sand Springs East HMA.

Wild horses from the adoption were transported to four pick-up sites: Ridgecrest, Calif.; Pauls Valley, Okla.; Elm Creek, Neb.; and Cross Plains, Tenn. The animals, formerly Nevada residents, have been met by adopters who live in 19 states.

Horses for the adoption were selected in June from 450 animals at the National Wild Horse and Burro Center in Palomino Valley. Wranglers Cary Frost, Mike Myers and John Neill brought 80 studs down the alley and into the chute for booster shots. The first group remained studs; the next batch through the chute were gelded.

Mares and foals were a challenge as mothers and babies do not always stay together in a large corral. Frost, Myers and Neill proved to be observant as they matched mother with foal.



John Winnepenninkx

Chris Ross photographed each pair, while Winnepenninkx; Sharon Kipping, Palomino Valley manager; Wilma Frei and Maxine Shane, Nevada State Office; operated gates, checked tag numbers, eyeballed heights and made film runs. A similar operation occurred in mid-July when the animals were videotaped by Superior Livestock Auction for the satellite downlink adoption. Palomino Valley assistant manager Rod Coleman sent the animals down the chutes, while Art Ferraro, of the BLM National Training Center, observed the videotaping techniques to use on future downlink adoptions.

The auction was a new experience for both the BLM downlink team and for Superior Livestock Auction of Fort Worth, Texas. Contracting officer Wilma Frei tracked the money for the event, and wild horse program lead Terry Woosley led the team.

The eastern connection was Shayne Banks, public affairs specialist in Jackson, Mississippi. Banks researched the concept in early 1999, at the request of Nevada State Director Bob Abbey who supported testing the waters with the new adoption method.

Superior Livestock Auction provided air time for the downlink, videotaped the animals for both a preview and actual bidding with a live auctioneer, and ran a videotaped "public service" announcement about the event during cattle auctions. The announcement featured Nevada gathers supervised by Winnemucca Field Office personnel and equines at Palomino Valley, and was produced by Ferraro. The event was also promoted in Superior's auction catalog.

Will BLM do another downlink adoption? The answer is "Yes." Team members will have evaluated the past event and are already planning the next satellite adoption.

New Deputy Director Brings International Budgeting Skills to Administrative Post

Theresa R. Coleman, Nevada's new deputy state director for support services, is just discovering the West and public lands management, but she is an experienced hand at program management.

A public administrator and epidemiologist by schooling, she came to Reno and the BLM from New York City. Coleman spent 17 years with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which is the nation's prevention agency. CDC aggressively addresses ways to prevent and/or control disease, including chronic illnesses, intentional violence, biological terrorism and other threats to the nation's health.

Coleman holds a graduate degree in public health from the Medical College of Virginia, majoring in epidemiology and administration, as well as an undergraduate degree in business and industrial psychology from the University of Detroit-Mercy in her hometown of Detroit, Michigan.

Her first assignment with the CDC was to Memphis, followed by New York City, Fort Lauderdale, Richmond, the District of Columbia, and back to New York, where she was on loan from the CDC to the United Nations Children's Fund through an intergovernmental personnel act agreement. At UNICEF, she served as project officer for its global polio eradication program. Her two years at the UNICEF headquarters involved coordinating $60 million to $80 million in funds and activities to support the mass immunization campaigns in more than 60 countries in Africa, South and East Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

Coleman welcomes the changes the BLM assignment offers and is looking forward to visiting the Nevada field offices.

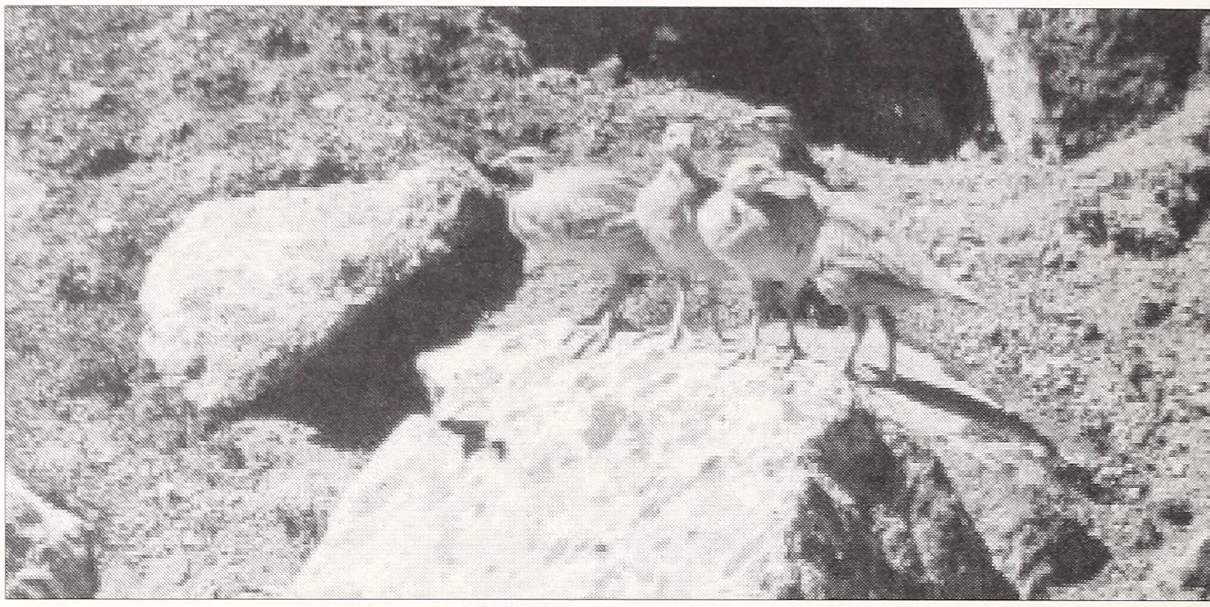
"The chance to see some of the most beautiful parts of the country is part of my reason for accepting this position," said Coleman. "The West is a whole new world to me and I'm anxious to explore it. I want to visit the caves near Ely. I want to tour mines and see Red Rock and the Black Rock Desert. I want to learn about Nevada's rangelands, wild horses and archaeological sites."

Theresa Coleman

While the Reno area doesn't offer as many opportunities for two of her favorite pastimes, eating ethnic foods and watching foreign films, Coleman said she has been welcomed by her co-workers and staff.

"My co-workers have been great, everybody is friendly and helpful. I'm excited to be here and I look forward to getting immersed in the activities of Support Services.

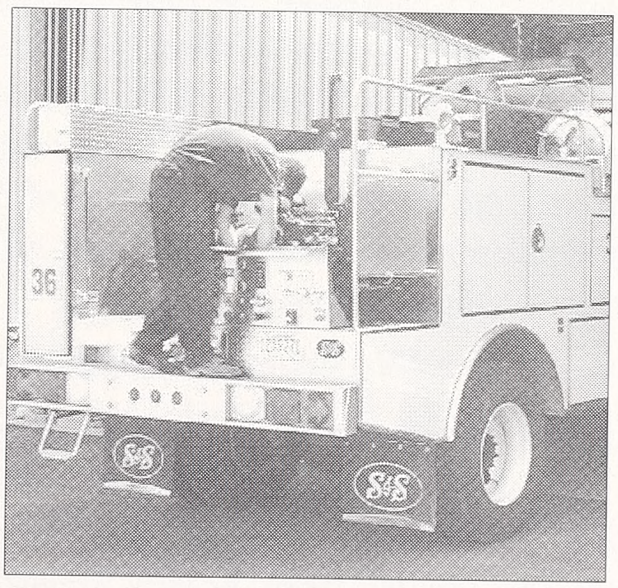
Snapshots From the Burned Land



Chukar partridge gather on a rock, above, to survey their burned-over home. At left, a dust devil sweeps up ash and soil in the aftermath of wildland fire. Below, a firefighter is silhouetted by flame as he sets a backfire during the 1999 Nevada fire siege.

Above, aprons of white ash are all that remain of the needles on these pinyon pines on a Nevada hillside. At right, a crew member snugs down equipment on a fire truck, prior to departure for a renewed fire fight. Below, maintenance and resupply time brings a pause on the ground for a BLM contract tanker at the Reno-Stead Airport. In the background is the nearly-complete Interagency Dispatch Center, to be staffed by BLM.

BLM Photos



The *Art* of Science on the Range

By JoLynn Worley

Growing up in a Montana farming community, Gene Seidlitz worked with plants and water and animals and dirt; so he headed to an agriculture college and a job in rangeland management. At the time he didn't realize how much he enjoys working with people, too.

The people part of range management is where the rewards and challenges are the most satisfying and frustrating. Meshing the raw data collected from monitoring with the needs of the rancher, wildlife, wild horses and other public land uses into a multiple-use decision can be a difficult balancing act. The numbers derived from science are impersonal; add personalities and needs into the multiple use equation and you have the art of range management. Sooner or later, every range specialist finds out you can't have one without the other.

Little Owyhee Allotment

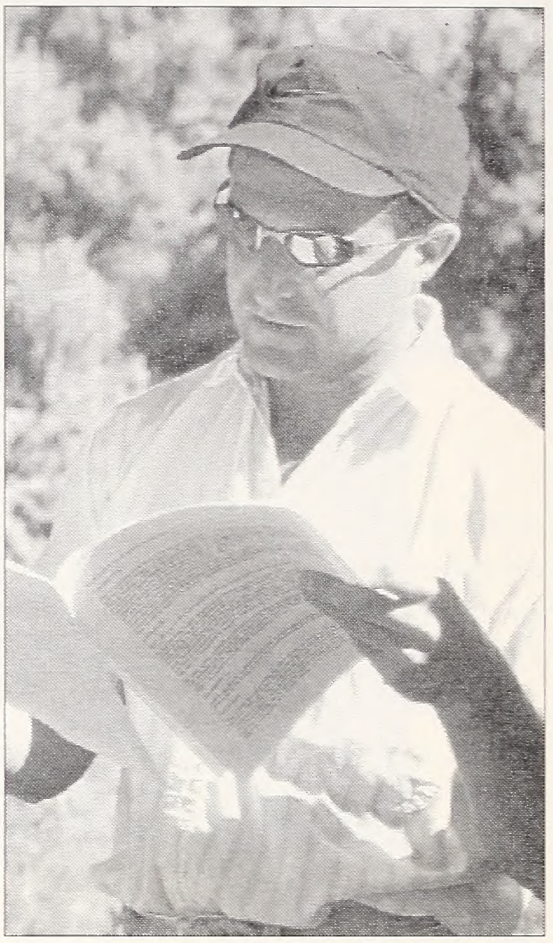
One of Seidlitz's pieces of the public land is the Little Owyhee Allotment. At 550,000 acres, the Little Owyhee Allotment is roughly the size of the state of Rhode Island, and is one of the biggest grazing allotments in Nevada. It's a one-way, three-hour drive from the Winnemucca Office to the top of the allotment along the Idaho border.

Two rivers, by Nevada standards, course through the allotment: the North Fork of the Little Humboldt and the East Fork of the Little Owyhee. The allotment's namesake, the Little Owyhee River, drains from Nevada into Idaho, one of the few waters that flows out of Nevada's Great Basin. The East Fork of the Little Owhyee flows into the Owyhee River which runs into the Snake River which courses into the Columbia River which spills into the Pacific Ocean. The same ocean crossed by Hawaiian Islanders who rowed these rivers and inspired the name Owyhee – a phonetic spelling of Hawaii.

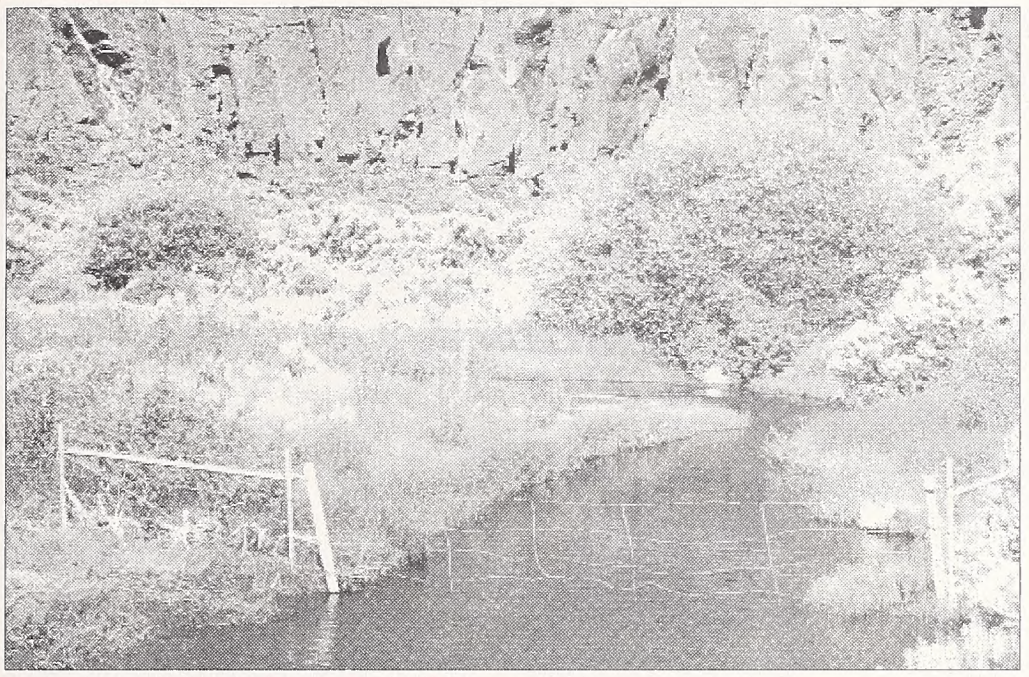
Wetland Meadow Riparians

Keeping the riparian habitat lush and green along banks of these rivers is a critical element in managing the allotment. Equally important is keeping the 594 acres of upland meadow riparian habitats healthy. Like stream bank riparian zones, healthy wetland riparian meadows offer life-sustaining water and forage in a dry coarse sagebrush sea. Wetlands are highly important to sage grouse as brooding habitat. Insects congregate at wetlands and provide a virtual buffet to hens feeding chicks.

Seidlitz has spent summers since the early '90s on this allotment and 16 others managed by the Winnemucca Field Office. When he arrived, the allotment was up for evaluation. Monitoring data collected during the 1970s and '80s needed analysis and review to prepare an allotment evaluation. The conclusions of the evaluation were dire: All 594 acres of wetland riparian habitat showed heavy use from livestock and wild



Gene Seidlitz checks what he sees on the ground against what he has on paper. Plant diversity and quantity are part of having a healthy stream. An average water temperature around 68 degrees is critical for the survival of rainbow and brown trout in the river. In-stream thermographs chart temperatures over a period of time and can indicate improvement to stream side riparians as the average water temperature stays cooler during the summer months.



A healthy wetland riparian is like a sponge; it holds water. Indicators of a healthy wetland are:

• Is wet every year, and holds water through the summer.

• Some "punching" but not too much. Punching is holes or indentations made by livestock, wild horses and wildlife that walk on the meadow. If there is too much punching, drainage and evaporation will increase, reducing the amount of water in the wetland.

• Good diversity of plants.

horses, and the condition of the North Fork of the Little Humboldt River had declined to 26 percent of optimum habitat.

A Tough Decision

The grazing prescription laid out in the final multiple-use decision was drastic, reducing the numbers of livestock and wild horses grazing the riparian areas and shortening the season of use for livestock on the spring and summer pastures. It appeared that would be the only way to stop the heavy use on the wetland meadows and start improving the water quality and fishery habitat throughout the allotment.

The grazing permit holder, Nevada First Corporation, and other interested groups didn't see it that way. The permittee, the Nevada Division of Wildlife, Wild Horse Organized Assistance and the Commission for the Preservation of Wild Horses appealed the decision.

Nevada First wanted the chance to prove to the BLM they could improve the management of the allotment under a different grazing prescription. They offered to relocate water troughs away from riparian areas and fence some wetlands. The changes would keep the livestock on the uplands longer, reducing the impact on the riparians.

A way to resolve the appeals emerged. An agreement was reached that would meet the needs of Nevada First's livestock operation and BLM's management objectives for the allotment. Nevada First would be given the opportunity to manage their livestock and meet the allotment objectives; if not, safeguards were in place to adjust the season of use the following year. The specifics of the adjustments would be made in consultation with the other affected interests. Failing an agreement, the BLM would make specific reductions until the objectives were met. The guarantee that corrective actions would take place immediately created a comfort zone for the interested publics.

Nevada First has lived up to the bargain. They've spent hundreds of hours herding livestock to even out the use on riparian and upland habitats. They've paid for, built and repaired fences around wetlands. As a result of the time, effort and money invested by Nevada First the court proceedings were dismissed.

The number of horses the allotment can support was set at 298 in1994. The BLM removed 603 wild horses from the allotment in 1997. There are nearly 600 on the allotment now.

A Game Plan Well Executed

Seidlitz is pleased that BLM's objectives for the allotment have been met every year since the agreement was made, with the exception of one area which will be fenced this year.

"The challenges of dealing with the resources and all the interested publics makes this job interesting," said Seidlitz. "It's not just working with interested publics, but with the interdisciplinary teams that develop allotment evaluations. A range person heads up the team, which includes biologists, wild horse specialists, geologists–whichever disciplines are involved."

The key to working out the difference of opinions in managing the Owyhee Allotment was the mutual respect among the people involved. A willingness to listen, understand and work toward resolution opens the door to the artful application of rangeland science.

The Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) team holds a meeting each morning to discuss the previous day's findings and map the new day's assignments. The widest possible collection of resources specialists work toward applying best science to bringing healthy conditions to burned lands.

Restoring Health to the Land

Resource Issues, Rangeland Restoration Addressed Before, During, After Wildland Fire

By Barbara Cook

Wildland fire draws the headlines. Once the fire is out, the media understandably moves on to other subjects. For land managers, the end of flames and departure of firefighters is only the beginning.

Left in ashes, the landscape would soon be covered with cheatgrass, an exotic weed that grows quickly a shallow mass of roots, depriving other plants of water and the chance to get established. Cheatgrass matures quickly and builds up fuel that invites fire to return.

When a fire begins getting serious, requiring more firefighters, BLM dispatches a resource advisor to the fire. Armed with maps and coordinating with all types of BLM specialists, the advisor helps the fire boss make a series of determinations.

Under the advisor's direction, tanker-bombers will avoid riparian areas and wetlands. The advisor determines if bulldozer fire lines can be bladed, and where land should be left undisturbed. Special areas may get intense protection.

The Nevada Seedbank, operated by the Nevada Division of Forestry in Washoe Valley, has native seed available for the immediate rehabilitation work of bulldozed lines and camp areas. When possible, this is done by fire crews before they return to their base. At the base, engines are carefully washed, to prevent carrying seed, especially noxious weed seed, from one site to another.

The advisor is concerned with the full spectrum of resources. Wildlife habitat protection is coordinated with the Nevada Division of Wildlife. Cultural resource sites are identified by archaeologists, and determinations made about the level of protection individual sites require.

"The resource advisor is tied to a cell phone or a radio, constantly checking with a variety of people," said Rick Brigham, who held that role in the Reservoir fire north of Reno and at the PahRah fire near Sparks in July. "The work is not always successful, but the goal

is to minimize the damage done by any individual fire."

When firefighters depart the charred land, rehabilitation begins. Often, contractors are called upon for aerial photos of the burned land, to assist in identification of all kinds of ground features. The resource advisor will play a role, from first-hand knowledge of the burned area, and may be the person who leads the rehabilitation planning.

Ideally, a rehabilitation plan is developed within 21 days of the close of firefighting. In actuality, though, planning can take longer after larger fires. Some of the summer 1999, fires have already been addressed by staff in the field offices. For the lands burned in the August firestorm, another approach has been taken.

Mobilizing a BAER Team

Addressing restoration of the huge areas left blackened across northern Nevada, BLM has called in two Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation teams. Referred to as the BAER team (pronounced "bear"), the interdisciplinary groups are tasked with developing three-year comprehensive rehabilitation plans to ensure site stabilization and restoration of watersheds. The BAER team which arrived in Elko during August is one of two national teams organized by the Department of the Interior. Tom Gavin, team leader for the Southern States BAER Team, developed the BAER concept, convinced the Department to sanction it, and has led a team since 1994. The other BAER team in Nevada this August is staffed by Department of Agriculture agency personnel and was deployed to Winnemucca.

Gavin's team is an interagency mix of biologists, soil scientists, archaeologists, hydrologists, range conservationists and foresters from federal land managing agencies: the BLM, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Park Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs. One of the first things Gavin did was to establish an adjoining team at the Battle Mountain BLM Field Office to assess impacts and make recommendations for that area, and feed that information into the comprehensive plan.

The team members are working closely with resource advisors from local BLM and USFS offices, the Nevada Division of Forestry, Nevada Division of Wildlife, and tribal governments to collect field data on the impacts of wildfires and related fire suppression activities. These impacts include loss of vegetation, soil erosion, loss of wildlife habitat, decline in water quality, and a potential change in grass and shrub species.

Addressing 1.5 Million Acres

The County Commissions of Elko, Lander, Eureka, Humbolt and Pershing, as well as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Farm Service Agency, and local agricultural extension agents work with the team to complete an accurate assessment of the damage from the wildfires. Local ranchers have had the opportunity to review and comment on seed mixes for aerial seeding of burned areas, and have given the BAER team valuable input. Local involvement has been key in developing a rehabilitation plan which is tuned to the needs of local citizens, restores the land to a healthy condition, and stabilizes the soil in critical areas where vegetation has been completely removed.

Continued next page

Rick Brigham, left, a wildlife biologist in Carson City, and Rick Depaoli, contract specialist, use aerial photographs of a burned area, along with maps. to plan seed types and other rehabilitation needs.

Resource Issues, Rangeland Restoration

Continued from preceding page

This is no small task. With nearly 1.5 million acres affected, developing the assessment and rehabilitation proposals is a monumental task, the largest ever taken on by the BAER team. As Team Leader Gavin stated, "It will be the largest rehabilitation plan ever proposed under a single document, because of the number of acres affected and fires involved." Because of the enormity of the task, damage assessments completed by county officials and local agencies are crucial in developing the big picture, especially since the plan will recommend aggressive seeding and rehabilitation treatments starting this fall that cover thousands of acres, irrespective of jurisdictional boundaries. It's also a golden opportunity for all agencies to work together to find ways to implement the rehabilitation treatments the plan will recommend.

A number of factors are involved the design of rehabilitation. Seed mix is determined not only by the landscape, but also by the availability of seed. In July, Jim Johnson, manager of the BLM seed bank in Boise, called for bids to obtain over a million pounds of seed to begin rehabilitation of lands burned in the greater Intermountain region this year. But, their seed supply is already spoken for. Another order will be placed later this year if any is available.

Although the seed mix will always focus on native species, one imported species, forage kochia, is often included and has been used to some extent during the past 15 years, because it is capable of competing with cheatgrass, to help break the fire cycle.

Hot Fires Leave Little Behind

Sometimes no reseeding is required. Fires that burn cool often leave the "root crowns" of grasses and shrubs. But, the August fires were hot, leaving little alive in their wake. "Some of that ground is baked several inches deep," said Brigham. Areas which have become too heavily infested with cheatgrass, and have burned several times before, are not suitable for reseeding. The intense competition of cheatgrass prevents other species from becoming established.

The timing for implementation of a reseeding plan is determined in large part by weather conditions during the fall and winter. Aerial seeding is often done on top of snow, a technique which has been successful in many areas.

After the firefight, burned land needs help to recover. Immediate attention is given to seeding of firelines made by bulldozers and other damage caused in suppression. Long-term rehabilitation efforts begin shortly thereafter.

Some plant species respond best when the seed is placed in the ground with a rangeland drill, a heavy-duty seed planting machine designed for wildland use. Yet another technique is planting seedlings by hand. The Nevada State Nursery in Washoe Valley, and other federal sources, provide young plants. When possible, a corps of volunteers is recruited to do the planting.

Grazing of the newly-seeded lands is carefully managed for a number of

years after reseeding. Livestock are excluded for the first two years, and sometimes for a longer time.

Occasionally, in an effort to slow the competitive nature of cheatgrass, heavy grazing may be allowed during the short time the cheatgrass is palatable. This can help prevent the plants from going to seed while the rehabilitation seed is germinating.

In the dry Great Basin, rangeland recovery is not fast, but it is sure. A visitor after the first year may feel like the project failed. then, five to ten years after application, the landscape will display the often-dramatic results.

In many cases, the recovering and restored ranges show a return to native plants, and establishment of a healthy ecosystem which will support wildlife and domestic grazing, and will discourage the rapid spread of wildland fire in the future.

Barbara Cook is a public information officer who was assigned to the BAER team.

Veteran BLM Oil, Gas Inspector Honored For Cooperative Work with Nevada Industry

Johnny Stout, 20-year veteran of federal oil and gas inspection in Nevada production fields, was honored by the Nevada Commission on Mineral Resources for his contributions to the oil and gas program.

During Stout's tenure with the oil program in Nevada, which began in 1979, the industry has expanded from two producing oil fields, both in Railroad Valley, to 15 fields statewide. Shortly after arrival, he was tasked with cleanup of the oldest oil field in Nevada, at Eagle Springs. This involved overseeing the removal of old surface disposal pits, and other debris from the exploration period.

The new operator at the time, Foreland Corp., inherited nearly a million dollars in environmental liability. Coordinating the clean-up with Nye County, the State of Nevada, and the BLM, this liability has been corrected. Eagle Springs today is the third largest producer in Nevada. BLM honored Foreland in 1996 with a National Health of the Land award.

Stout arrived in Nevada as an inspector for the Conservation Division of the U.S. Geologic Survey. Since that agency had no office in Ely, Stout worked out of his home there. Later he was transferred to the Minerals Management Service, and when that service was phased out, he was assigned to the BLM.

Johnny Stout

Well connected within the industry, Stout often volunteers his assistance in coordination of drilling rig moves, and in locating obscure pieces of equipment in the frontier environment of Nevada oil and gas exploration.

Stout pioneered use of digital photos to document field operations. Using electronic technology, photographs can be sent to offices across the state to facilitate discussion with multiple agency offices of spill events or resolve other issues.

Bringing an interagency approach to oil field inspections, he has helped draft and implement various agreements and memorandums of understanding.

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act

Public Auction Scheduled in November For Parcels of BLM Land in Las Vegas

By Phillip Guerrero

The federal government has put out the "For Sale" sign on nearly 27,000 acres of land in the greater Las Vegas Valley. BLM estimates the value of the acreage at anywhere between $500 million to $1 billion.

The first 200 acres goes on the auction block Nov. 4 at 10 a.m. at the Las Vegas City Hall, Plaza Level, Council Chambers. "The combined appraised value of the 200 acres is about $15 million," said Mike Ford, former BLM project manager.

24 Parcels of Varying Size

This first sale consists of 24 parcels ranging in size from 1.25 acres to 42.5 acres. Appraised values vary from $29,000 to $2.9 million. The sale is a product of the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act signed into law by President Clinton in October 1998. The bill, sponsored by former Congressman John Ensign and Senator Richard Bryan, allows the BLM to sell to the highest bidder valuable land in the greater Las Vegas Valley.

In the past, some have questioned the appraised value of federal property exchanged with developers. Now, with the ability to sell land in an open competitive process, the federal government can ensure fair market value for the land, thereby bringing the greatest return to the taxpayer. "In the past we have had to rely on appraisals only, and where large tracts of land are involved, it was difficult to come up with comparable sales," said Mike Dwyer, BLM's Las Vegas Field Office manager. "The competitive process is far superior because it allows the market to set the value."

Use of Proceeds from Sales

With the money raised from the land sales, the BLM retains 85 percent of the proceeds for the following:

- Acquisition of environmentally sensitive land in Nevada, with priority given to lands in Clark County
- Capital improvements at the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, the Desert National Wildlife Refuge, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, and Spring Mountain National Recreation Area. Improvements are subject to a limitation of 25 percent of annual land sales.
- Development of a multi-species habitat conservation plan in Clark County.
- Development of parks, trails, and natural areas in Clark County.

Ten percent of the land sale proceeds goes to the Southern Nevada Water Authority for infrastructure needs and five percent goes to the Nevada State Permanent School Fund.

All the money from BLM land sales in Las Vegas must be used in Nevada. So, the profit for federal land sales in Las Vegas benefits the people of Nevada. The fund has already raised $1.9 million from land sales which were ongoing when the Act was signed into law.

Working With Local Government

The new law requires the BLM to work in concert with the local government in which federal land is being considered for sale. If the land being sold is within the Henderson city limits, BLM must have the concurrence of the City before any sale takes place.

"In most cases the BLM defers to the local government to tell us how and when they want land privatized," said Ford. "The cities and the county know best what they are trying to achieve in these developing areas. BLM land sales will be conducted to support their goals."

In keeping with this partnership approach, BLM is working with Clark County and the cities of Las Vegas, Henderson and North Las Vegas since October 1998, to develop a process for nominating and approving parcels for sale.

In conjunction with the land sale, the BLM has made more than 10,000 acres available to local governments and non-profit agencies for schools, parks, libraries, police stations, fire stations, roads and churches. This land for public purposes has been made available at very low cost, or for free in the case of parks. The Recreational and Public Purposes Act allows the BLM to make public land available to benefit local citizens. Some of the land covered under the Act includes Sam Boyd stadium; and Bonanza, Cimarron-Memorial, Durango, Las Vegas and Silverado high schools. Land for schools, fire stations and police stations is available to local governments for the low price of $10 an acre.

While the BLM manages about 54,000 acres of land within the greater Las Vegas Valley, only 27,000 acres will be sold. The highest proportion of the remaining acreage is already spoken for by local governments. The Southern Nevada Lands Act doesn't change that.

"Local government still gets the first crack at any parcel for these public purposes," said Ford. "In any other town, the taxpayer would have to pay for land for schools, parks and fire stations. That's not the case in Las Vegas."

Examples of Sale Parcels

Some of the acreage for sale in November includes:

- 12.5 acres adjacent to the Summerlin Parkway and Buffalo.
- 170 acres along the Las Vegas Beltway (I- 215) and Windmill Lane. These land tracts range from 2.5 acres to 40 acres in size.
- 5 acres between South Eastern Avenue and Jeffreys Street.

Those who want more information about the sale may receive maps and the sale bid form on the internet at **www.nv.blm.gov**. From the web site, click on Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, then Land Sales. Interested parties may write or call the BLM's Las Vegas Field Office at 4765 West Vegas Drive, Las Vegas NV 89108, phone (702) 647-5114. The field office is located on the southeast corner of Vegas Drive and Decatur Blvd.

The sale is a combination sealed bid and oral auction. Registration of bidders for the oral auction begins at 8 a.m. and ends promptly at 10 a.m. on Nov. 4 at the Las Vegas City Hall. Those unable to attend the oral auction may submit sealed bids to the BLM Las Vegas Field Office. Sealed bids must be received in the Las Vegas Field Office by 4:15 p.m. Nov. 2. Parcels are sold to the high bidder whether by sealed or oral bid.

Parcels won't be sold for less than appraised fair market value. Unsold parcels will not be offered at less than fair market value, but may be offered at another date. The BLM plans to host two sales per year until the 27,000 acres are all sold.

"Our goal in privatizing these lands is to allow the community to grow at a pace and in a manner consistent with the plans of local government," said Dwyer. "The new law relieves the BLM from managing islands of public land within the city. The law allows the Las Vegas Field Office to focus on the 3.5 million acres of public lands outside of the city."

Open Spaces Remain Public

Those 3.5 million acres of public lands are in Clark and southern Nye counties. "That land is the big backyard we all share," said Dwyer. "It's a big part of what makes southern Nevada a special place to live and we intend to keep it that way."

Correcting the record

In the previous issue of *Nevada Sage*, an article on the Department of the Interior in Nevada neglected to mention a portion of a national park that lies within Nevada. Death Valley National Monument lands are primarily located in southern California, however, a portion of the park extends into Nevada. The parklands in Nye and Esmeralda counties are undeveloped. Although the area is larger than that of the Great Basin National Park in eastern Nevada, it receives few visitors.

Charred land and burned fenceposts are part of the grim legacy of a severe summer of wildland fire in Nevada. Damage to Nevada's natural resources from fires, most of which were ignited by lightning strikes, is extensive. Rehabilitation of the rangeland will require combined activity of federal, state, local and private resources.

Photo by Bob Goodman

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